DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 095 572 CS 201 534

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TITLE Fatalism and Type of Information Sensitivity.
PUB DATE Aug 74
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (57th, San Diego, August 18-21, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Communication (Thought Transfer); *Educational Research; Higher Education; *Journalism; Learning Characteristics; Learning Theories; *Locus of Control; *Psychological Characteristics; *Social Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *Fatalism

ABSTRACT

Fatalism as measured by Rotter's internal-external locus of control scale is the degree to which a person generally believes that events affecting his life are largely determined by other forces rather than by his own efforts. The purpose of this paper is to examine behavioral science theory concerning fatalism, and develop and test which types of benefit explanation information are more effective in forming positive attitudes among high fatalists towards attitude objects. This paper attempts to demonstrate that under certain information stimuli conditions, the conclusions of several authors quoted concerning the role of communications in causing positive responses among fatalists should be modified. When the immediate and/or individual benefits of an attitude object are explained to high fatalists, they respond more to such information content across subjects of communication then to exhortation, reward enumeration, future reward explanation, or to society reward explanation. (Author)

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ED 095572

Fatalism and Type of Information Sensitivity

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Fatalism as measured by Rotter's internal-external locus of control scale is the degree to which a person generally believes that events affecting his life are largely determined by other forces rather than by his own efforts[1].

High fatalism is considered a problem for the following reasons:

1) Fatalism inhibits learning of problem solving information compared to descriptive information[2];

2) There is a high incidence of high fatalism within lower socio-economic groups, groups that particularly need to be motivated[3]; and,

3) The incidence of high fatalism in the general American population appears to be increasing[4].

The purpose of this paper is to examine behavioral science theory concerning fatalism, and develop and test which types of benefit explanation information are more effective in forming positive attitudes among high fatalists towards attitude objects. This paper attempts to demonstrate that under certain information stimuli conditions, the conclusions of several authors quoted below concerning the role of communications in causing positive responses among fatalists should be modified. For the sake of brevity the only authors I refer to specifically are Green, et. al., Grunig, Rogers, Rotter, and Seeman. The conclusions of these authors which should be modified are illustrated and discussed in the discussion section.

However, before reviewing selected aspects of behavioral science theory concerning fatalism, it is important to establish that the researchers who I cite within the fields of psychology, sociology, communications, and management are referring to the same general variable I have called fatalism.

Part of the data in this paper appeared in Nielsen's "Perceived Powerlessness and Sensitivity to Content Types" in the Autumn 1973 JQ. A version of this paper "Communications and Fatalism" appeared in the Spring 1974 JQ.

Within psychology Rotter defines internal-external locus of control as "the degree to which the individual perceives that the reward follows from, or is contingent upon, his own behavior or attributes versus the degree to which he feels the reward is controlled by forces outside of himself and may occur independently of his own actions"[5]. Rotter developed his I-E scale to measure this variable. Within sociology Seeman defines powerlessness alienation as "the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behavior cannot determine the occurence of the outcome, or reinforcements, he seeks"[6]. Seeman uses Rotter's I-E scale to measure this variable. Within communications research Rogers defines this variable as "Fatalism is the degree to which an individual perceives a lack of ability to control his future. Hence fatalism is a sort of generalized sense of powerlessness, one of the five dimensions of alienation postulated by Seeman"[7]. However, rather than using the Rotter scale that Seeman used, Rogers in his Colombian studies of fatalism developed and used his own scale based on the earlier work of Seeman and Rotter. Among one of five decision types conceptualized by Grunig in his Colombian studies is fatalism, which he defines as "in fatalism, alternatives are not considered because the individual believes that he cannot control his destiny, but instead thinks it is controlled by supernatural or other outside forces"[8]. Grunig does not use a socialpsychological scale to measure fatalism as the above authors have. Green in his consumer information seeking experiment refers to the variable as fatalism and uses Rotter's definition of internal-external locus of control and Rotter's I-E scale to measure fatalism[9].

The types of information this paper is concerned with are: reward enumeration; reward explanation; explanation of immediate-society rewards; explanation of future-society rewards; explanation of immediate-individual rewards; and, explanation of future-individual rewards. Reward enumeration information is a statement of several good qualities associated with an attitude object. Reward explanation information is an explanation of how rewards can be received through an attitude object. Immediate-society reward explanation information is an explanation of how rewards can be received immediately by society through the attitude object. Future-society reward explanation information is an explanation of how rewards can be received in the future by society through the attitude object. Immediate-individual reward explanation information is an explanation of how rewards can be received immediately by the individual through the attitude object. Future-individual reward explanation information is an explanation of how rewards can be received in the future by the individual through the attitude object. In the studies reported in this paper several different examples of each type of information were presented to people for their responses.

Hypotheses

Since low fatalists have a history of being rewarded for their own actions and have learned to believe that they can gain rewards through their own behavior[10], they should respond positively to those alternatives which the information indicates have more rewards associated with them. Since high fatalists have a history of not being rewarded for their own actions and consequently have learned to believe that they cannot gain rewards through their own actions, there should be little motivation for their taking the effort to positively respond to information that promises rewards. Therefore, it is hypothesized that: 1, High fatalists respond less to reward enumeration information than low fatalists.

Because of the high fatalist's history of not being rewarded for his own actions, he learns to believe that there is a weak or non-existent cause-effect (get/want[11]) relationship between his actions and rewards. Information that explains how there is a cause-effect relationship should be more effective than information which only states without any causal explanation that rewards will flow from his behavior. Therefore, it is hypothesized that: 2, High fatalists respond more to reward explanation information than to reward enumeration information, and the differences in the responses of high and low fatalists is less in response to reward explanation compared to reward enumeration information.

There is a negative relationship between fatalism and deferred gratification[12]. Since the high fatalist has learned to believe that he cannot control events, he perceives a higher risk in postponing

gratification. Therefore, it is hypothesized that 3, High fatalists respond more to immediate than to future reward explanation, and the differences in responses of high and low fatalists is less in response to explanations of immediate rewards than to explanations of future rewards.

Since high fatalists have learned to believe that they cannot control rewards within the environments in which they live, they should have little confidence that benefits accruing to society will reach them. Therefore, it is hypothesized that: 4, High fatalists respond more to information that explains how the individual can attain benefits than to information that explains how the society can gain rewards, and the differences in responses of high and low fatalists are less in response to explanations of individual than to society rewards.

It is also hypothesized that: 5, High fatalists respond more to immediate-individual reward explanation than to future-society reward explanation. Since this hypothesis is a combination of hypotheses 3 and 4, it should hold if they do. It is hypothesized that: 6, Fatalism explains more the responses to the set of theoretically derived information stimuli than education, income and age characteristics.

Methodology

In the magazine advertisement field experiment two hundred adult residents from Champaign and Urbana, Illinois were selected in a clustered random sample. An overview of the procedure used in the data collection follows. First, each subject was shown eight magazine advertisements for different products. One hundred different magazine advertisements from twenty different magazines were responded to. Advertisements were randomly assigned to people. Second, each person was asked to evaluate each of the products advertised on seven point semantic differential very bad-very good scales. Each person was also asked to indicate his intention toward buying or trying the attitude objects in the advertisements on seven point semantic differential very unlikely-very likely scales. Third, people were asked to evaluate on seven point scales: how much each advertisement explains the benefits of the attitude object; and, how many benefits of the attitude object are claimed or implied in the advertisements. Fourth, people completed a short form of Rotter's I-E scale. Hypothesized differences in responses to reward enumeration and reward explanation information were tested with paired t tests.

In the type of reward explanation study two hundred different adult residents of Urbana and Champaign, Illinois participated in a field experiment and were selected in a clustered random sample. In both studies, of those people asked to participate the response rate was over 90%. An overview of the procedure used in the data collection follows. First, people completed a short form of Rotter's I-E scale. Second, subjects responded to questions about their income, education, and age. While subjects were filling out these questions the inter-

viewers classified subjects as high or low fatalists according to whether they scored on the top or bottom half of the Rotter scale. Third, each person was shown one of the four types of reward explanation information for the theatre, state social services and consumers unions. Each person responded to a total of three information stimuli of the same type of reward explanation. Twenty different examples of each type of reward explanation information for each of three attitude objects were randomly assigned to subjects. Fourth, subjects were asked to indicate their intention toward supporting the attitude objects on seven point very likely-very unlikely semantic differential scales. Hypothesized differences in response to the different types of reward explanation information were tested with paired t tests. The hypothesis about whether fatalism, income, education or age characteristics most explained the responses to the set of theoretically derived types of reward explanation information was tested with canonical correlation analysis. Canonical correlation was used rather than multiple regression because the hypothesis is concerned with explaining responses to a set of information stimuli rather than to single types of information. Canonical analysis attempts to answer the questions: first, are the responses to the set of information stimuli dependent on the fatalistic, education, age and income characteristics of people; and second, which of the independent variables of fatalism, age, income or education contributes the most in explaining the relationship between the set of responses to the different types of information and the set of people characteristics[13].

Results

In two previous field experiments conducted in Utica and Syracuse, New York, and in one laboratory experiment conducted in Syracuse it was found that for the nutritional, reading and political behaviors considered, reward explanation information motivated high fatalists more than reward enumeration or conformity information. In addition, it was found that the differences in responses of high and low fatalists to reward explanation information were less than for reward enumeration and conformity information.

The information stimuli which acted as the independent variables manipulated in these three studies were constructed by the author. The purpose of the magazine advertisement field experiment conducted in Illinois was to test the results of the previous three studies with subjects from a different part of the country with actual commercial and possibly more realistic information stimuli not constructed by the author, the one hundred magazine advertisements.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported. The hypothesized differences were significant at p less than .05. See table I. High fatalists responded more to reward explanation information than to reward enumeration information and the differences in the responses of high and low fatalists is less in response to reward explanation compared to reward enumeration.

It was also found that degree of positive responses to all information types was higher for attitude object evaluations than for intentions toward attitude objects. This is to be expected since the constraints on evaluation are probably less than such constraints on intentions. However, the hypothesized pattern held for both.

On the basis of this study and the three previous studies referred to above, it was concluded that reward explanation information is an effective means for inducing positive responses among fatalists. We then decided to investigate what types of reward explanations were more effective in inducing positive responses among high fatalists than other types of reward explanation information.

Hypotheses 3, 4, 5 and 6 were supported. The hypothesized differences were significant at p less than .05. See table I. High fatalists responded more to immediate reward explanation than to future reward explanation, and the differences in responses of high and low fatalists were less in response to explanations of immediate rewards than to explanations of future rewards.

High fatalists responded more to information that explained how the individual can attain benefits than to information that explains how society can gain rewards, and the differences in responses of high and low fatalists were less in response to explanations of individual rewards than to explanations of society rewards.

High fatalists responded more to immediate-individual reward explanation than to future-society reward explanation, and the differences in the responses of high and low fatalists were less in response to immediate-individual reward explanation than to future-society reward explanation.

These findings held for all types of attitude objects studied.

In addition, the responses to the set of information types were dependent upon the fatalistic, education, age and income characteristics of subjects, and fatalism contributed most in explaining the

relationship between the set of responses to the set of theoretically derived types of reward explanation information and the set of consumer characteristics. See table II.

Discussion

These findings demonstrate that under reward explanation information stimuli conditions in general, and under immediate-individual reward explanation information stimuli conditions in particular, high fatalists responded positively. The field experimental conditions manipulated were type of information content, while significant changes in social structure during the few hours of the field experiment were unlikely to have occurred, and accounted for the positive responses. The only systematic changes occurring in the field experiment were types of information.

These findings should be interpreted within the context of the following previous research in psychology, sociology, management, and communications. Seeman in his studies of hospital and prison situations found that high fatalists were aware of less problem solving information than descriptive information about the institutions they were in. Seeman interprets these findings to mean that high fatalists do not seek or respond positively toward information that would help them function productively[14]. Green, et. al., in their experimental consumer behavior study found that fatalism was negatively related to prepurchase information purchasing. They interpreted this finding to mean that making available problem solving information to high fatalists does not induce them to utilize such information[15]. Grunig in his Columbian study concludes generally that "For the typologies with available opportunities, communication behavior was an important determinant of the typology; for those without opportunities it was nonexistent. Communication

behavior and its concomitant socialpsychological variables are a function of the situation in which an individual performs"[16]. More specifically with respect to fatalism, Grunig states that with respect to his fatalism decision type "Information seeking does not occur"[17]. Rogers in the three Columbian villages he studies found that fatalism was negatively related to communications and modernism variables such as literacy, mass media exposure, empathy, cosmopoliteness, innovativeness, aspirations, achievement motivation, and political knowledgeability[18].

The communications variables investigated in the studies of the above authors are different than the variables I investigated. Rogers studies mass media exposure of fatalists. Grunig studied the subjects people sought information about, the sources they sought it from, the perceived usefulness of information received, and the socioeconomic situations of different groups of people. Seeman and Green also studied the subjects people recalled and sought information about. My study investigated different types of information, the how of what was communicated as well as the subject the information was about. It is worth stating what should be obvious, that response to communications is a function of how something is stated and explained as well as the topic of the communication, the perceived usefulness of the information, the communication channel, the socioeconomic situation of the people being communicated with, etc. Message content includes the subject or topic of communication as well as how the subject or topic or idea is explained.

When the immediate-individual benefits of an attitude object are explained to high fatalists, they positively respond to such information content across subjects of communication. Therefore, the conclusions of the above authors concerning the causes of positive responses to communications among high fatalists should be modified to include how a message is presented.

The question might be asked, does type of reward explanation change a person's fatalism? The answer is probably not, as personality traits are not subject to easy changes. However, this does not reduce the significance of these findings. We have learned more about how to explain a behavior to a high fatalist within the experience and personality of the high fatalist with resultant positive responses by high fatalists. It is not necessary or even necessarily desirable to change the personality and character of people in order to encourage changes in their behavior. It should also be kept in mind that when one explains the immediate-individual benefits of an attitude object to a high fatalist, that the attitude object has in fact immediate-individual benefits.

The question might also be asked, did the immediate-individual reward explanation messages induce large motivational changes among high fatalists. The response variables investigated were verbal at one point in time rather than overt behavioral over long periods of time. The findings would have been more significant if the latter could have been investigated. However, with the exception of the Green experiment and the Syracuse experiment where the response vari-

ables were overt behavioral, all the above studies also were limited to verbal behaviors in short time periods.

The purpose of this discussion has not been to argue that message content is more or less important than situation, media, source, subject matter, etc. Such a debate is less important than learning how to effectively include and then combine all these relevant communications variables in communicating with and motivating fatalists.

Table I
Means of Responses To Different Types of Information

	High Fatalists		Low Fatalists
Field Experiment With Magazine Advertised Attitude Objects			
Reward Explanation			
Evaluation of Attitude Object	5.47		5.61
Intention Toward Attitude Object	5.18		5.06
Reward Enumeration			
Evaluation of Attitude Object	4.41	1*	5.31
Intention Toward Attitude Object	3.97	1*	4.92
Type of Reward Explanation Field Experiment			
Immediate-Individual Reward Explanation			
Theatre	5.12		4.81
Consumer Unions	5.85		5.10
State Social Services	5.71		4.65
Total	5.57		4.85
Immediate-Society Reward Explanation			
Theatre	4.28		5.02
Consumers Unions	3.74		4.96
State Social Services	3.96		4.23
Total	3.99		4.73
Future-Individual Reward Explanation			
Theatre	3.88		5.10
Consumer Unions	4.13		5.07
State Social Services	4.10		4.55
Total	4.03		4.90
Future Society Reward Explanation			
Theatre	1.97		4.75
Consumer Unions	2.04		4.84
State Social Services	1.83		4.01
Total	1.93		4.53
Total Immediate Reward Explanation	4.77		4.78
Total Future Reward Explanation	2.98		4.71
Total Individual Reward Explanation	4.79		4.87
Total Society Reward Explanation	2.96		4.63

2*, 5*, 3*, 4*

*, significant difference at p less than .05
1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 are hypothesized differences 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Table II
Canonical Output For Type of Reward Explanation Field Experiment

Canonical Correlation	.7761
p less than	.01
df	200

Eigenvalues of Dependent Variables: Responses To Different Types of Reward Explanation Information

Immediate-Individual Reward Explanation	-.5471
Immediate-Society Reward Explanation	.1842
Future-Individual Reward Explanation	.2659
Future-Society Reward Explanation	.4725

Eigenvalues of Independent Variables

Fatalism	-.7451
Income	.4087
Education	.3649
Age	.3129

Footnotes

1. Julian B. Rotter, "Generalized Expectancies For Internal Versus External Control of Reinforcements," Psychological Monographs: General and Applied, 80, 1, pp. 1-36.

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3. Rotter, op. cit.; Everett M. Rogers and Lynne Svenning, Modernization Among Peasants: The Impact of Communication (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1969) pp. 273-290.

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5. Rotter, op. cit., p. 1.

6. Seeman, op. cit., 1963, p. 270; Melvin Seeman, "The Urban Alienations: Some Dubious Theses from Marx to Marcuse," The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 19, 2 (January, 1971), p. 135.

7. Rogers, op. cit., p. 273.

8. James Grunig, "Communications and Economic Decision Making Processes of Colombian Peasants," Economic Development and Cultural Change, 19, 4, (July, 1971) p. 585.

9. Green, et. al., op. cit.

10. Rotter, op. cit.

11. Daniel Lerner, "International Cooperation and Communication in National Development," in Daniel Lerner and Wilbur Schramm, eds., Communication and Change in the Developing Countries (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1967) pp. 102-128.

12. I. Bialer, "Conceptualization of Success and Failure in Mentally Retarded and Normal Children," Journal of Personality, 54 (June, 1962) pp. 197-202.

13. Green, et. al., op. cit.

14. Seeman, 1963, op. cit; Seeman, 1962, op. cit.; Seeman, 1971, op. cit.

15. Green, et. al., op. cit.

16. Grunig, op. cit. p. 597.

17. Grunig, op. cit. p. 585.

18. Rogers, op. cit.